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TAGS: TO PHUM PREL PGOV VT

SUBJECT: TOGO: SANT'EGIDIO STILL ENGAGED

REF: Refs: a) Caracas 3022; b) Caracas 3262; c) Caracas 3223; d) Vatican 489; e) Vatican 508

CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, Pol/Econ Chief, Vatican, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Mario Giro, West Africa expert for the Vatican-linked Community of Sant'Egidio, told us recently that the Community remained in close contact with the Togolese government and the Union of Forces for Change (UFC) and hoped for further face-to-face talks in Rome between the two groups. Following meetings in July between the two sides in Rome, Sant'Egidio again convened delegations from the government and UFC in early November at the Community headquarters here. This coincided with the government's release of 135 political prisoners, an act Giro called a "great confidence-building measure." Giro and colleague Vittorio Scelzo called the November meetings a "step forward," but admitted that the sessions had not yielded anything definitive.

¶2. (C) Now, according to Giro, a third meeting would be a useful way to continue progress; he said discussions were underway in Lome to see if the sides would agree to a third meeting. Among current initiatives being considered for negotiation, Giro mentioned that opposition groups were preparing a list of people who had been stripped of their jobs because of their political actions. The UFC hopes the government will make some move to rectify the situation for these people as another confidence-building measure. Among the many issues at stake in negotiations, Giro mentioned army reform. He characterized the UFC as somewhat hard-line on the issue, but still hoped that a compromise might be possible.

¶3. (C) Giro praised the U.S. role in these negotiations and noted the need to pressure the government for continued constructive negotiations. "First one side is anxious to move forward, and then the other," he said. Now the government appears to be dragging its feet. [Note: Giro told us December 14 that he had received an unconfirmed message that the government had just agreed to a third Rome negotiating session. He did not yet know how much stock to put in the report.]

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